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ABSTRACT

Project CREST (Collaboration for Rural Education Special Teachers) is an Ohio teacher training program that addresses the teaching requirements of rural schools, permits student teaching experiences in rural school settings, and assists rural schools in developing staff development programs. The primary components of Project CREST are: (1) a 1-year Master's-level teacher training program for rural special educators; (2) a 1-year mentoring program for veteran rural special educators and first-year novices; (3) a skill-training program in the art of collaboration; and (4) a skill training program in planning and implementing professional development programs. The program pairs practicing veteran rural special education teachers with first-year special education teachers. These mentor-mentee teaching pairs team teach, coteach, peer teach, and collaborate in the rural special education classroom of the veteran teacher. In addition to this collaborative teaching, they complete coursework from Bowling Green State University that leads to a master's degree. During the instructional portion of the project, the veteran and novice teachers take turns traveling to a distance learning site during the school day for completion of their coursework. The coursework centers on collaboration skills to enhance service delivery for rural special education, and on skills and knowledge concerning rural school environments. This paper lists and describes the courses and projects completed by participants and the competencies obtained in developing professional development or inservice programing. (KS)

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TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS: THE ART OF WORKING TOGETHER AND SHARING

Introduction

Despite the apparent fact that the greatest number of schools in the United States have been defined as rural, little attention has been paid to the unique issues facing teachers as rural educators. Not only is this lack of attention found in the media, it is also found in teacher preparation programs throughout the United States.

The majority of teachers employed in rural schools are found to be originally from rural areas themselves (Hare, 1991). This finding has assisted rural school administrators in locating and identifying those prospective teacher employees who will be most likely to succeed with the unique demands of a rural school environment. While this fact may assist in the employment of the strongest candidates for successful teaching in a rural community, and the familiarity with the rural school culture that such candidates bring with themselves may be helpful in ameliorating the serious problems faced by the lack of training for teaching in rural communities, it would seem far more beneficial to all concerned for teacher preparation programs to address the needs and issues related to rural schools. None too surprisingly, however, it appears that most of our training programs focus primarily, if not entirely, on the needs and issues related to urban and suburban schools (Campbell, 1986).

If we are to plan effective teacher training programs that address the unique needs of teachers employed in rural settings, we must identify what these needs are. Seifert and Simone (1980) have suggested the following set of characteristics as those which are essential for teachers employed in rural and small schools: the ability and certifiability to teach more than one grade level or subject area; the ability to supervise several extracurricular activities; the ability to adjust to the uniqueness of the community; the ability to overcome students' cultural differences; and, the ability to teach a wide range of abilities in a single classroom. Indeed, many may recognize these characteristics as those which are important to teachers in both urban and suburban schools. While they may be important for teachers in urban and suburban schools, they are most certainly <u>essential</u> for teachers in rural schools!

In addition, while in-service, and staff development activities may be problematic for all school personnel regardless of their school

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location; due to the isolation of many rural schools, there are several specific problems experienced by rural schools when attempting to provide professional development opportunities that other schools -- urban and suburban -- often do not experience. For example, many rural schools are far removed from centers of higher learning, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to obtain the resources usually offered by colleges and universities for the purpose of staff development. Berkeley and Ludlow (1991) indicate that the design and delivery of inservice training for rural educators is complicated by three factors: rural schools have limited access to advanced training programs offered by colleges and universities; rural educators have limited financial resources and support for travel to workshops, conferences and other professional development activities; and, attrition among rural educators impedes any attempt at on-going staff development plan. Moreover, rural schools often experience specific problems, e.g., geographic isolation, transportation barriers, cultural differences, and the like, that are not addressed by those who offer staff development. A number of authors discuss the difficulty in providing staff development in general, and in many cases, staff development for rural school personnel (e.g., Apps, 1991; Galbraith, 1990, 1991; Idol, 1983; Marrs, 1984; McKeachie, 1978). Helge (1981) suggested that inadequate staff development was a major contributor to the personnel retention problems frequently experienced by rural schools. And, indeed, staff development may be a necessary ingredient for any recipe that attempts to address the problems of attrition and retention of rural educators.

> Professional educators in rural America must be able to cope with sparsity, utilize community resources, be creative and visionary, and maintain a learner-centered orientation. (Galbraith, 1992, p. 309)

Again, if rural educators in the United States are expected to comply with all of the abovementioned expectations, rural schools will need to heavily invest in the professional development of their teachers. Moreover, teacher training programs may need to instill in their training candidates the need for continued staff development, and provide their candidates with the skills necessary to acquire future professional development.

Several universities in the United States do focus on rural teacher training or provide special programs for those interested in rural employment, including, for example, Western Montana College, Brigham Young University, Berea College in Kentucky, Western Michigan University, the University of North Dakota, Murray State University, Western Washington University, and Bowling Green State University in Ohio. These efforts notwithstanding, it seems that it will be necessary, in order to meet the overwhelming need of rural schools, for many more teacher training institutions to develop programming which addresses the teaching requirements of rural schools and permits student teaching experiences in rural school settings (e.g., Gold,

Russell, & Williams, 1993; Horn, 1985; Russell, Gold, & Williams, 1992). Moreover, it would seem advisable for teacher training programs to assist rural schools in developing staff development programs that would enhance the professional development of rural teachers presently employed.

This paper focuses on a training model that encourages teachers to collaborate for problem-solving and better service delivery through peer training. Sharing of expertise among the professional school staff has been shown to have powerful effects for the empowerment of teachers, and for the improvement of service delivery for students with special needs in rural schools. Working together and sharing, and developing partnerships among staff members, can often answer the difficult questions concerning staff development faced by rural schools.

Project CREST: A Model Teacher Training Program for Rural Schools

Project CREST (Collaboration for Rural Education Special Teachers) is a federally-funded, four-year rural Appalachia Ohio teacher-training project (cf. Russell, Williams, & Gold, 1993). The funding was awarded to the Department of Special Education at Bowling Green State University by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services. The faculty of Project CREST have incorporated coursework and practicum experiences into their training project with the goal of empowering rural special education teachers to design and implement staff development activities in their home school districts, and with the goal of increasing the likelihood of professional success for teachers new to the rural school environment.

The primary components of Project CREST include the following: 1) a one-year Master's-level teacher training program for rural special educators; 2) a one-year mentoring program for veteran rural special educators and first-year entering rural special educators; 3) a skill training program in the art of collaboration; and, 4) a skill training program in planning and implementing professional development programs. This program, Project CREST, pairs practicing veteran rural special education teachers with first-year novice special education teachers. These mentor-mentee teaching pairs team teach, co-teach, peer teach, and collaborate (Russell & Kaderavek, 1993) in the rural special education classroom of the veteran teacher. In addition to this collaborative teaching, they complete coursework from Bowling Green State University which leads to a Master's degree in education with particular emphasis on collaboration for rural special education personnel.

During the instructional portion of the project, the veteran and novice teachers take turns traveling to a distance learning site during the school day for completion of their coursework. When one member of the pair is on-site for coursework, the other member of the pair is teaching in the veteran teacher's rural special education

classroom. At the end of one academic year and one summer term, both the veteran and novice teachers are eligible to receive their Master's degree, assuming successful completion of all coursework and other degree requirements.

The above characteristics of this project allow veteran teachers to earn a Master's degree without giving up their contracts, salaries, or credit for teaching experience. Furthermore, the characteristics of this training project allow novice teachers to gain one year of mentored teaching experience, a graduate assistant stipend, a one-year credit of teaching experience, and a Master's degree in rural special education.

The primary emphasis of the coursework centers on learning collaboration skills in order to enhance service delivery for rural special education, and on skills and knowledge concerning rural school environments in order to enhance the novice teacher's ability to succeed in the rural school environment. The following courses, with brief descriptions, are included in the Master's degree teacher training program for Project CREST:

EDSE 649: Problems and Issues for Personnel in Rural Special Education, 3 semester hours; is a modified course that relates to developing an understanding of the context of a rural school and its environment as well as knowledge concerning the state-of-the-art of rural special education;

EDSE 680: Foundations and Instructional Strategies for Rural Special Education, 3 semester hours; is a newly developed course designed to promote an understanding of the differences involved in serving students with handicaps in rural and urban environments as well as knowledge of effective service delivery models for rural children and youth with handicaps (including low-incidence handicaps such as severely emotionally disturbed, hearing impaired, and visually impaired);

EDSE 680: Advanced Instructional Design for Rural Special Education, 3 semester hours; is a newly developed course designed to address the participant's awareness of alternative resources in order to provide effective services to rural students with handicaps, and to develop the skills necessary to identify these alternative resources;

EDSE 680: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - I, 3 semester hours; is a newly developed course designed to introduce skills needed in working with citizens, agencies, and other school professionals in rural communities to facilitate cooperation among schools, school professionals, and service agencies to better serve students with handicaps;

EDSE 680: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - II, 3 semester hours; is a newly developed course designed to facilitate an understanding of personal development skills (a) for the participant's own professional growth, and (b) for building local support systems in the participant's rural school environment;

EDSE 680: Peer Training as a Change Process in Rural Schools, 3 semester hours; is a newly developed course designed to address learning methods and strategies for training others in one's specific school environment; participants learn to become trainers of other adults, thereby extending the concepts of collaboration - learned and practiced as a part of Project CREST - beyond their own learning experiences, and sharing with other staff in their home school;

EDSE 697: Practicum in Rural Special Education - I, 6 semester hours; is a course which provides participants with a planned teaching experience in a rural school setting; in particular, this practicum emphasizes those skills gained in Foundations and Instructional Strategies for Rural Special Education, and Collaboration for Related Educational Services - I;

EDSE 697: Practicum in Rural Special Education - II, 6 semester hours; is a course which provides participants with a second planned teaching experience in a rural school setting; in particular, this practicum emphasizes those skills gained in Peer Training as a Change Process in Rural Schools, Advanced Instructional Design for Rural Special Education, and Collaboration for Related Educational Services - II;

EDFI 641: Statistics in Education, 3 semester hours; is an existing course which provides students with knowledge and skills related to statistics as a tool in education and research, and includes descriptive statistics, transformation of scores, sampling and probability, linear correlation and regression, introduction to statistical difference, and basic tests of significance; also, skills in using statistical methods unique to special populations is provided;

EDFI 642: Research in Education, 3 semester hours; is an existing course which provides students with knowledge and skills related to research and includes identification and evaluation of research problems, research designs, use of library resources, data gathering, and writing research reports; unique to this project, this course includes the identification and planning of research projects relative to rural special education settings which participants complete in later phases of this project;

EDSE 680: Professional Development Seminar in Special Education, 1 semester hour; is a course which provides participants with advisement regarding the graduate program in special education, and includes information on available support services for graduate students, faculty research, areas of specialization, forms needing attention for completion of graduate studies, methods for completing degree programs, and other related topics.

Upon completion of the courses and program, Project CREST participants have had the opportunity to develop knowledge of particular characteristics related to rural schools and rural environments; knowledge of the needs involved in the service delivery of special education in rural settings; and, skills needed to use collaboration, professional development, and adult learning techniques as a tools for expanding special education service delivery for rural school districts. In addition, participants have completed a one-year, bi-directional, mentoring program; have completed their Master's degree; and, have engaged in rural special education research as well as numerous collaboration and professional development projects.

Though the primary focus of this preservice training program emphasizes the needs of the rural special education teacher, the collaboration and professional development skills gained by participants are applied to activities that expand the scope of the special educator outside their own classroom. Examples of projects that participants complete include:

a) Community Resources Collaboration Project - teachers are taught collaborative skills to use in working with a specific community resource (e.g., local banks; American Red Cross; Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation);

b) Auxiliary Service Collaboration Project - teachers are taught collaborative skills to use in working with support services within their school district (e.g., school psychologist; guidance counselor; speech-language pathologist);

c) System Change Project - teachers are taught collaborative skills to use in making changes within the school system (e.g., mainstreaming practices; grading practices; programs for working with at-risk students);

d) Parent Collaboration Project - teachers are taught collaborative skills to use in working with parents (e.g., parent support groups; parent newsletters; parent volunteer groups);

e) Mainstreaming Collaboration Project - teachers are taught collaborative skills to use in mainstreaming students into regular classrooms (e.g., IEP involvement; homework; instructional accommodations);

f) Volunteer Collaboration Project - teachers are taught collaborative skills to use in developing volunteer projects (e.g.,

peer tutoring; senior citizen volunteer projects; student volunteer service projects); and,

g) Staff Development Collaboration Project - teachers are taught collaborative skills to use in developing professional development programs in their schools (e.g., programs on mainstreaming; inclusion; attention deficit/hyperactive disorder; competency testing; collaboration; behavior management).

Inherent within the very nature of Project CREST is the notion of collaboration. The veteran teacher and the novice teacher must work together in completing cooperative planning, teaching and evaluation with the shared rural special education classroom. In addition, the pairs of teachers work together to conduct research on various topics relevant to the rural school community. Though this model for teacher training was developed for special education, it could easily be adapted for use in any teacher training preservice program. To highlight this, one might consider the fact that the Staff Development Collaboration Projects are often designed by the participants for all faculty within the rural school setting where the participants are teaching!

Teachers Teaching Teachers

Project CREST participants gain most of their training on how to plan collaborative staff development programs through the two collaboration courses, and through the course titled "Peer Training as a Change Process in Rural Schools." Collaborative skills in planning professional development programs for other adults are introduced to participants in Project CREST. Through such collaborative efforts, participants learn to conduct needs assessments, to plan and implement staff development programs, and to evaluate these staff development programs. Participants are presented with several models of collaborative program planning and implementation. Examples of the collaborative models include the model employed by West, Idol, and Cannon (1989), and the model used by Friend and Cook (1992).

Within the collaboration courses, participants are taught to identify the stages of professional development represented by those school professionals for whom they are planning the inservice activities. Project participants practice using the Stages of Professional Development Survey developed by Parsons and Meyers (1984). They also use various needs assessments tools such as the Needs Assessment Instrument: Training in Collaborative Consultation Skills for Teacher, Support Staff and Administrators developed by West, Idol, and Cannon (1989). Augmenting these materials are the texts used by project participants: Collaboration in the Schools: An Inservice and Preservice Curriculum for Teachers, Support Staff and Administrators by West, Idol, and Cannon (1989); and, Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals by Friend and Cook (1992).

In the course "Peer Training as a Change Process in Rural Schools," participants are taught the basic steps for developing professional development or inservice programming. The focus of the course is on learning methods and strategies for training others in one's specific school environment. Participants learn to become trainers of other adults, thereby extending the concepts of collaboration, learned and practiced as a part of Project CREST, beyond their own learning experiences, and sharing with other staff in their home school. More specifically, this course is designed to assist the participants in attaining concepts and competencies, including:

-the ability to recognize variables that effect the adult learner's decision to participate in learning experiences;
-the ability to recognize the importance for obtaining administrative support for adult learning experiences;
-the ability to recognize the degree to which professional responsibility and assignment impact adult learning;
-the ability to recognize the importance to obtain appropriate resources for adult learning;
-the ability to exhibit the following skills which promote adult learning: modeling, peer coaching, process prompts, co-teaching, feedback, error correction procedures, collaboration, and team teaching;
-the ability to motivate adult learners by recognizing the need for their participation in the selection of learning goals, and by providing appropriate incentives;
-the ability to understand the significance of the adult learner's professional routine and style of practice relative to acquisition of strategies and techniques;
-the ability to use formative and summative data for planning, delivering, and evaluating adult learning; and,
-the ability to design, plan, implement, and evaluate staff development programs on collaboration for adult learners in rural school settings.

Resources for instruction of these concepts and competencies include Idol's (1983) framework for conducting inservice programs (i.e., gaining administrative support, selecting topics, surveying teacher needs, designing workshop outline, eliciting preliminary feedback, conducting workshop, obtaining evaluative feedback); Galbraith's Adult Learning Methods (1990) from which participants gain a wealth of knowledge concerning appropriate methods and strategies for use when instructing adult learners; and, Galbraith's Education in the Rural American Community (1992) from which participants gain insight into the needs and characteristics of the adult learner and adult education in rural areas. Furthermore, additional resources and readings from Apps (1991), McKeachie (1978), and others are used to supplement the primary resources.

The primary assignment of the "Peer Training..." course is the completion of an inservice or professional development program by the

participants at their respective school or school district. This assignment is organized according to the seven basic components previously cited by Idol (1983).

Participants in the first year of Project CREST completed staff development program primarily on the topics of "inclusion" or "collaboration." These professional development programs were, in many cases, planned for both general and special educators. The most common form of staff development program was the one- or two-day inservice program held after school hours. In addition to implementing inservice programs at their own schools, all of the project participants assisted the project faculty in planning and implementing two regional inservice programs on "collaboration" for teachers in neighboring rural communities.

Conclusion

Professional development is an essential ingredient for the ever-changing school system. For rural schools, often isolated from higher education centers and struggling with restricted budgets, staff development becomes an evermore pressing issue!

In order to stay abreast, teachers must become learners involved in lifelong education. Again, this concern becomes evermore pressing in rural schools where teachers deal with a myriad of problems not present in the urban or suburban school environment.

Teacher training institutions need to accept the challenge and begin training teachers to address the needs of staff development for rural professional educators. Teachers need to feel empowered to answer their own school problems by being able to organize staff development to answer these problems, and by being able to utilize the skills of the professionals within arm's reach -- the teacher next door, the teacher in the other building, the special education teacher, the reading teacher, and the many others in the school environment -- who really hold the answers, the keys, to solving today's problems in educating America's rural youth!

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